



**Children's Hunger Alliance
Testimony Provided to the House Finance Committee
House Bill 64 Main Operating Budget FY2016-2017
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President/CEO of Children's Hunger Alliance**

Chair Smith, Ranking Minority Member Driehaus, and members of the Committee, my name is Mary Lynn Foster and I am the President/CEO of Children's Hunger Alliance (CHA, or Alliance). Children's Hunger Alliance is Ohio's largest sponsor of family child care providers, as well as the state's largest sponsor of afterschool meal programs. In this testimony, I seek to describe CHA's School and Summer Nutrition Division, to reinforce the broad economic benefits of its mission, and to request renewal of state support for school breakfast and summer meal programs.

CHA's School and Summer Nutrition Division (Division) works with school personnel to analyze a school or district's breakfast service and develop strategies for increasing participation without drastically increasing labor costs or impinging on the instructional day. The Division does similar work with respect to summer meal programs. Once these programs are in place, the provider school or district becomes eligible to draw down operating dollars from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Payments are made directly to providers. While USDA administers these funds, they represent money paid by Ohioans in the form of federal taxes. As such, the School and Summer Nutrition Division works to bring back to Ohio that which it has already paid, now in the form of food for hungry children.

A hungry child cannot learn and an undereducated adult cannot earn. Research demonstrates the positive impact that school meal programs can have on a student's attendance, behavior, and achievement. Just as importantly, these programs provide significant economic benefits. For instance, if Ohio could increase participation in breakfast programs to equal that of lunch programs, and double summer meal participation to just 14% of eligible children, Ohio schools could receive over \$90 million in additional USDA funds. This money would be used to purchase food and other products, to pay program employee wages, and for other program expenses. Subsequently, the infusion of this money into the Ohio economy would provide compounding benefits as it passes through multiple private business conduits. Furthermore, a healthy, educated young adult is more capable of avoiding reliance on the much more expensive government safety net.

From FY2002-2007, CHA received state funding to support the Alliance's mission. In the final year CHA received nearly \$ 2 million in state funds to support the work of the agency. During that time, CHA helped providers to increase school breakfast participation by 70% and summer meal participation by 574%. Furthermore, in terms of increased USDA reimbursements received by schools and other meal providers the return on investment of state dollars by CHA was 6-to-1. By any standard, these numbers represent remarkable achievements on behalf of Ohio and its children.



Unfortunately, a major downturn in the economy caused state support for CHA to be suspended in the FY2009-2010 operating budget. Since that time, although the total number of children participating in breakfast and lunch programs has increased, without the ability to work extensively statewide the rate of participation by eligible children has declined.

CHA is asking Ohio to renew its investment in the Alliance's mission by allocating for CHA \$2 million (\$1 million per fiscal year) in House Bill 64 so that we can continue our work on school breakfast and summer meal programs. These funds will be targeted towards those areas of the state where CHA has little or no private grant or corporate support for this work. The Alliance strongly believes that with the requested support we will be able to assist schools and other providers to generate the historical 6-to-1 return on the state's investment and increase by 20,000 the number of eligible children participating in these programs each year.

Once again, **a hungry child cannot learn and an undereducated adult cannot earn.** Providing access to school and summer meals is an inexpensive intervention strategy that returns federal dollars to the state's economy, dollars that otherwise would flow to another state or remain in Washington. Children's Hunger Alliance asks you to help us assist schools and other meal providers to ensure that children can focus on learning – and not a growling, hungry belly.

Thank you for your consideration of our proposal (see attached summary). I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

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